Cultivating Caring Classrooms: A Critical Study of Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment in Light of NelNoddings' Ethics of Care

***Dr Maneesh Kumar & **Dr Rashmi Srivastava**
*DIET Coordinator (HPPI), District Institute of Education and Training, Kumarbagh, West Champaran, Bihar,
**Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Studies, School of Education, Mahatma Gandhi Central University, East Champaran, Bihar

Abstract

The paper critically discusses the philosophy of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in the perspective of Ethics of Care as articulated by NelNoddings, with the focus on the centrality of caring relationships in the educational practice (Noddings, 1984). In modern schools, this growing focus on education as standardized, accountable and performance based has frequently overshadowed the affective, interpersonal and moral aspects of education (Biesta, 2010). The paper claims that these instrumental practices impair the holism of the development of learners and invites a redefinition of education that takes care as one of the most crucial moral and pedagogical commitments. Based on the main ideas of Noddings of relational engagement, attentiveness, responsiveness, and moral formation, the paper evaluates the way the curricular priorities, teaching-learning practices, and the assessment structures influence the classroom experiences. Through the analysis, it is possible to say that academic performance often dominates emotional and moral development in curricula, whereas pedagogical approach aims at power and content delivery instead of dialogue, compassion and mutual understanding. Additionally, assessment practices are criticized due to focusing on quantification and competition which may harm the well-being and sense of belonging among learners. The research recommendations, based on critical synthesis of the educational literature, are procuring curricula based on the lived experiences of the learners, pedagogies that promote dialogic and empathetic engagement and rubric methods that are formative, contextual and that promote holistic learning (Black and Wiliam, 2009). The paper adds to the body of literature in the scholarly community discussing humanizing education and how to establish learning settings that are ethically responsive to students (Noddings, 2013).

Keywords- *Ethics of Care; NelNoddings; Caring Classrooms; Curriculum Theory; Pedagogical Practices; Educational Assessment; Moral Development*

Introduction:

Education is basically a human and social practice and it is not confined to the passing of knowledge but it encompasses the moral, emotional and social growth of learners. Nevertheless, modern-day education system is being influenced more and more by the discourses of standardization, accountability and performance measure. These methods emphasise effectiveness, comparability and measurable results to the detriment of relationship, empathy, and ethical practice in classes. This means that teaching and learning have become technocratic and the learners have been perceived as performers, and the teachers have been perceived as

deliverers of set pieces of information, as opposed to engaging in meaningful human interactions (Biesta, 2010). To address these issues, Ethics of Care by NelNoddings offers a strong philosophical perspective to reconsider the purpose and activities of education. The Ethics of Care, founded on the moral philosophy and feminist ethics, accentuate the role of caring relationships, attentiveness, and responsiveness in the moral and educational life (Noddings, 1984). In this view, education is not value-neutral, but it is moral in nature and depends on the quality of interactions between teachers and students. In this regard, caring is not just an emotional inclination but a willful pedagogical devotion which guides the decisions in curriculum development, classroom experience, and evaluation procedures (Noddings, 2003). The value that is used in education is manifested by curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment as the core structures. However, such structures tend to exemplify the priorities of the dominant powers that favor cognitive success and standardization of performance instead of emotional well-being and moral development of the learners. The curricula models can be out of touch with the realities of the students, pedagogy is based on control and delivery instead of dialogue and understanding, and the assessment system can also be focused on quantification and competition, supporting hierarchies and marginalization (Apple, 2013). This may help to destroy the sense of belonging of students, as well as to damage the relational basis of learning. There has been a growing debate by scholars in support of educational methods that perceive learners as complete individuals and accord the teaching profession ethical responsibilities (Giroux, 2011). In this discussion, the Ethics of Care provides a logical approach to the critical analysis of how schooling practices may foster or inhibit caring classroom practices. Care-based education offers a challenge to reductionist interpretations of learning by, in other words, forging the relationality and moral consideration, and promoting more humane and inclusive modes and practices of learning (hooks, 2003). It is against this context that the current work is a critique of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in relation to Ethics of Care as suggested by NelNoddings. It attempts to confront how these dimensions may be reconceptualized to create caring classrooms that are able not only to foster academic learning, but also moral, emotional as well as relational growth.

Rationale of the Study- The present research is based on the growing worry regarding the more instrumental nature of the modern education system, in which the focus on standardization, accountability, and other performance criteria tend to devalue the relational and ethical aspects of education. Even though they are meant to enhance efficiency and comparability, such structures often put aside the emotional well-being, moral growth, and belongingness of students and thus reduce the larger goals of education (Biesta, 2010). This discrepancy is the reason that critical re-evaluation over school practices is necessary because schooling should continue to be a human and ethically based action and not a purely technical procedure. The concept of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are some of the major tools that help in putting values as far as education is concerned into practice in the classroom. Nevertheless, such institutions are usually constructed in such a way that they focus on cognitive results and quantifiable success without providing much room to care, compassion, and interpersonal interactions. Students are therefore

likely to be disengaged and anxious and teachers face the challenge of institutional limitation which limits their responsiveness to the needs of different students (Apple, 2013). Such problems necessitate an ethical framework that pre-empts relationships and responsiveness to deal with such issues. Ethics of Care by NelNoddings is a valuable theoretical source to this question that vision. This framework puts care as the central focus of education to challenge the paradigms of competition and control that control the mainstream (Noddings, 1984). The present research aims to fill in the gaps of the literature by critically analyzing the concept of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in terms of care and become part of the ongoing practice of humanizing education and creating an inclusive, ethically responsive classroom experience.

Statement of the problem: Cultivating Caring Classrooms: A Critical Study of Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment in Light of NelNoddings' Ethics of Care.

Delimitation of this study- This study focused on only the curriculum of the CBSE board schooland analysis the The Value Education: A Handbook for Teachers (2019).

Methodology of the Study- To fulfil the objective of this research paper, the researcher chose to apply a qualitative research approach andconducted content analysis of the related documents.

Population- The curriculum of the CBSE board school isconsidered the population of this study.

Sampling Technique- In this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling strategy, which is a non-probability sampling technique.

Research Objective -To evaluate the curriculum and pedagogical assessment in light of the ethics of caring in education.

Research Question- What are the components reflected in the pedagogical assessment and curriculum in relation to ethics of care in education?

Analysis and Interpretation:

To fulfil this objective, the researcher chooses 'The Value Education: A Handbook for Teachers (2019) for thematic analysis. The researcher identified the themes that are related to Noddings' ethics of care education. According to NelNoddings (1984), 'Care education is an alternative approach to values education', and this handbook talks about the practice of value education in schools. This handbook helps educators teach value education with the help of the regular and prescribed curriculum of the CBSE. This handbook seeks to develop characteristics like peace, compassion, empathy, and honesty in pupils so they can live in harmony with themselves, others, and the natural environment. This handbook ensures that value education should not be taught as a subject, but should be taught in conjunction with other subjects. In the curriculum, values education serves two primary purposes: bringing all other subjects together

under a comprehensive vision of values and using the ethics of care as a lens to humanize education. The analysis of themes related to ethics of care in education in the CBSE curriculum is as follows.

1. **Positive Attitude-** Teachers should encourage students to adopt a positive attitude for self-development. When students become positive in all aspects of their lives, they will be able to know himself/herself very well, and this positive attitude will help them to achieve their goals in life. A positive attitude increases the happiness of students, and NelNoddings (2003) in her book 'Happiness and Education' argues that when students are happy, they learn better (p.2).
2. **To be Kind and Avoid Violence-** To save society from intolerance and violence, it is necessary to develop qualities related to love, kindness, friendship, sympathy, and care for each other in the students (p.9). NelNoddings (2002) further argues that the primary goal of education should be to create nurturing, competent, affectionate, and friendly individuals(p.94, 99). According to Noddings (2002), it is essential for children to learn how to care for others (p.99).
3. **Discover Inner Peace-** Teachers should play an active role in helping their students understand their own selves (p.25). It will be helpful for self-actualization. Students who possess inner peace have the ability to spread collective happiness and harmony throughout society, and true happiness comes with inner peace. NelNoddings (2003) said that happy people are not violent or intentionally cruel toward human beings ornonhuman animals, thus making this world a happy place where all children live peacefully (p.2).
4. **Learning to Live Together-**Teachers should encourage cooperative learning, sharing, mutual aid, trust-building, and cooperation. When groups collaborate well, they lessen conflict and highlight the value of teamwork. NelNoddings (2003) advocates that teachers can promote learning to live together by living with students in the allocated time of schools, lunchtime could be used as an educational opportunity, and Teachers can engage students in conversation and nutrition too during lunchtime (p.156). Also on the playing field, teachers can share experiences. NelNoddings (2003) is concerned about the separation between two partners and families, and she said we should educate the students to live together by sharing the knowledge of problems and challenges of constructing a shared life (p.193). According to Noddings (2002), students should be encouraged to collaborate and support one another as doing so will enhance both their academic achievement and their capacity for caring. It is the special responsibility of teachers to communicate the moral significance of cooperation (p.20).
5. **Respect Human Dignity-**The goal of this method, which is based on the ideas of justice and human rights, is to cultivate awareness that acknowledges both one's own and other people's rights.

6. **Be the Real You -** It is essential to develop behavioural skills like time management, honesty, and strong character to effectively interact with society and resolve conflicts.
7. **Developing Critical Thinking:** This involves using reason and logic to think. It is a crucial part of democratic institutions and involves decision-making as well.
8. **Handle Conflict Nonviolently:** This is a fundamental part of teaching principles. It includes the abilities needed for mediation, creative problem-solving, active listening, conflict resolution, and alternative problem-solving.
9. **Promote Peace in the Community:** Schools should give young students the chance to learn about social realities and to comprehend both their own obligations and responsibilities as well as those of others.
10. **Caring for the Earth-** The curriculum of the CBSE board ensures the safety of the planet and environment because the safety of the planet influences our future and the whole of mankind. NelNoddings (2003) also advocates care for plants, care for ideas, and care for instruments. These values will be helpful to make theEarth a better place.

Care Education Through Core Subjects- To promote care education, it is important that every indoor and outdoor activity of schools should be care-centric. The curriculum of the CBSE board talks about 'curriculum onion', which indicates various layers of school practices. There are four classifications of activities in the Curriculum Onion (p.30): these classifications are external curriculum, hidden curriculum, core subjects, and thoughts of the lesson.

- **External Curriculum for Care Education-** Home is the first school of every child, and parents are their first teachers; thus, in schools value education should be related to the background of the students. The development of virtues should not only depend on core subjects but also on the school's environment. (p.31).NelNoddings (2002) also advocates the addition of home and parenting into school practices (p.23). Noddings (2003) argues that informal education is the best method of educating students about culture and society, thus, our schools should create opportunities for informal learning (p. 156).
- **Hidden Curriculum for Care Education-** Beyond the core curriculum, a lot of many things that are helpful to learn. When a student works in the garden of the school, plays with their colleague, and doespracticals in labs, they learn skills like Dignity of labour, respect for work, cooperation, and teamwork unconsciously. Through this hidden curriculum, students can learn to care for others, care for plants, and care for ideas (Noddings, 2002).
- **Care Education through Core Subjects-**The CBSE board (2019) recommended incorporating values education into other subjects to promote care education (p.25). For instance: Languages: story and description of social ills. Science: the principles that guide scientific inquiry. History- confronting historical issues and reacting to them, Social Science. Geography: The ways in which various living environments impact cultures, values, and behaviours. Physical education: team spirit, sports cooperation against competition.

English Primary			
Topic	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**Tools for assessment**
Two Gentlemen of Verona	1) Show the love and care towards the family 2) Work sincerely 3) Selflessness 4) Determination 5) Arduous work 6) Self-control	1) Care for others 2) Sincerity towards work 3) Selflessness 4) Self-discipline	• Group Discussion • Quiz • Writing an article • Observation of behaviour • Roleplay

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

Hindi Primary			
Topic	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**Assessment Tools**
Jhansi-ki-Rani (Poem)	1) Love and care for the Motherland. 2) Patriotism and nationalism 3) Self-Sacrifice 4) Courage 5) Gender equality	1) Patriotism and love for the country 2) Sacrifice 3) Courage 4) Gender sensitivity	• Students' recitation and narration of the poem • Rhythm, gestures, pronunciation, etc. • Seeinghow students behave on their own both inside andoutside of the classroom. • Peer evaluation • Role-playing

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

Environmental science Class-I			
Contents	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**Assessment Tools**
My Family	1) Relationship 2) Trust 3) Affection and love 4) Honor for every member of the family 5) Giving and sharing 6) Closeness	1) Healthy relationships amongst family members. 2) Learn to share their things 3) Show concern and care for the elderly and sick 4) Celebrating all important festivals and occasions together 5) Extending moral support	• Fancy Dress. • Family tree/ album • Celebrating days like Grandparents' Day, Father's Day, Mother's Day • Thank you, cards. • Role Play • Describing words for each family member.

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

Environmental science Class-II			
Contents	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**Assessment Tools**
Our Helpers	1) Cooperation and Teamwork 2) Dignity of labour 3) Respect for all	1) Honor all occupations. 2) Recognize how each job is interdependent.	• Fancy dress competitions • Special assembly on Labour Day • Thanksgiving card for a helper in the school. • Riddles: Guess my profession • Listing of Equipment used by various helpers

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

Environmental science Class-III			
Contents	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**AssessmentTools**
Our Universe	1) Coexistence 2) Interdependence 3) One Earth, one family "VasudevKutumbkam"	The students become aware of: 1) The world around us. 2) The natural resources or celestial bodies. 3) They will develop a scientific temperament.	• Models and projects. • Jigsaw puzzle • Poems about the Sun, planets, stars, etc. are recited. • Worksheets and response sheets. • An exam. • Ascending and descending order of planets (mathematical skills).

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

Mathematics Class-VIII			
Content	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**Assessment Tools**
Profit & loss	1) Honesty 2) Integrity 3) Self-Discipline	After studying the topic, students will be able to 1) Honest in their dealing 2) Emotionally balanced 3) Understanding the concept of integrity	• Observing spontaneous behaviour • Peer group opinion. • Grading by teachers.

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

History Class-VIII			
Content	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**AssessmentTools**
The Mughal Dynasty	1) Honesty 2) Integrity 3) Self-Discipline	After studying the topic, students will be able to 1) Honestin their dealing 2) Emotionally balanced 3) Understanding the concept of integrity	• Observing spontaneous behaviour • Peer-group opinion. • Grading by teachers.

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

History Class-VIII			
Content	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**AssessmentTools**
The National Movement (1970-1947)	1) Patriotism 2) Secularism 3) Tolerance and love for all 4) Integration of the Nation 5) Honouring other people's cultural values 6) Collaboration	After studying the topic, students will be able to 1) They will understand the true meaning of Nationalism 2) Understand the meaning of Gandhi's Satyagraha and Non-Violence 3) Cooperative in life.	• Project work • Working in a mixed group • Preparing scrapbooks on India's Independence struggle. • Anecdotal records. • Role Play • Film Making • Self-written poems or songs.

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

History Class-XI			
Content	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**Assessment Tools**
French Revolution	1) Fraternity, liberty, and equality. 2) Recognize human rights and fundamental obligations	After studying the topic, students will be able to 1) Fight to construct a nation. 2) Develops into the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. 3) Recognize the significance of the nation's emblem	• Essay competition on human rights and their importance. • Role Play • Presentation on the intellectuals and philosophers who inspired the revolution.

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

Civics Class-IX			
Content	**Values Proposed to be Inculcated**	**Expected Outcomes**	**AssessmentTools**
Constitutional Design	1) Respect the constitution and democracy. 2) Secularism. 3) Respect for Diversity.	After studying the topic, students will be able to 1) Conscious and more responsible for their duties. 2) Make democratic decision-making a habit. 3) Recognize what secularism means. 4) Use constitutional methods to settle the disputes	• Response sheet • Debate competition in 'Youth Sansad' • Drafting a school constitution according to school norms.

Source: Values Education: A Handbook for Teachers

Interpretation:

NelNoddings (2003) argued that homemaking should be part of the curriculum for all students, and the curriculum of domestic science should include the topics of nutrition, safety, care of pets, cleanliness and order, budgets and shopping, light and ventilation, basic home repairs, and care of clothing (p.110). The curriculum of the CBSE board includes home-making and domestic science in the subjects of environmental science. With the help of the topics of 'Our Helper' in class three, the CBSE board tried to inculcate caring skills like care of pets, care of clothing, nutrition, and cleanliness, another topic of environmental science named 'My family' in class one; students can learn about the respect of relationships and making a healthy relationship. While studying of topic 'profit and loss' in mathematics class eighth students can learn budget management in their deals. NelNoddings (2002) suggested that educators can effectively include themes of care in our traditional curriculum (p.33). The CBSE Board is concerned about important life skills through its curriculum, this board tries to inculcate values like Care, equality, liberty, non-violence, cooperation and teamwork, universal love and tolerance, emotional balance, honesty and integrity, scientific temperament, trust, sharing, and caring.

Upon careful analysis of this document, the researcher has concluded that the CBSE board's curriculum aims to instill the values of care education, as put forth by NelNoddings, in students through the use of various subjects such as English literature, Hindi, Environmental science, History, Geography, Mathematics, and Civics.

Findings of the Study :

The CBSE Board seeks to nurture caring competencies among learners by embedding everyday life themes such as pet care, maintenance of clothing, balanced nutrition, personal and

environmental cleanliness, respectful relationships, and responsible financial habits within subjects taught at different grade levels. Reflecting NelNoddings' (2002) proposition that care can be effectively integrated into conventional curricular structures, the CBSE curriculum adopts a holistic vision of education that goes beyond academic attainment. It places strong emphasis on cultivating life skills and ethical values, including equality, freedom, non-violence, cooperation, teamwork, tolerance, emotional stability, honesty, integrity, scientific outlook, trust, sharing, and empathy.

Moreover, the curriculum gives focused attention to several interconnected dimensions: environmental awareness and sustainability to encourage stewardship of natural resources; social responsibility and active citizenship to promote respect for diversity and democratic principles; emotional well-being and mental health awareness to support students' balanced growth; ethical reasoning to guide sound decision-making in everyday life; and community participation through service-oriented learning to foster compassion and social engagement. Collectively, these elements aim to develop socially sensitive, responsible, and caring individuals.

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